



# The Association of the United States Army Family Programs Update

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[www.ausea.org/family](http://www.ausea.org/family)

## Monthly News from the Association of the United States Army Family Programs Directorate

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### A Message from Sylvia Kidd, Director of Family Programs

*I just returned from my fifth consecutive American Women's Activities in Germany Conference better known as AWAG. This year's conference was held in Sonthofen Germany at the AllgäuSternHotel. AWAG was great as always, with numerous informative sessions to help prepare community volunteers but for the delegates the best benefit this conference may have provided was the opportunity to get together to share and recharge.*

*I have often mentioned how impressive I find military families and their continued strength in an ever increasingly stressful situation and these spouses were no exception. Many of those that I spoke with had soldiers that were deployed, several had just had their tours extended and some had just recently returned from Iraq. One lady's husband had just come home in March but had already been notified that he would be deploying again by mid May. The attitude of these AWAG spouses is representative of military families everywhere.*

*I applaud military families for their ability to stay positive and stay involved, especially in the face of all of the turmoil that continues to be reported from the war zone. There is no doubt that they are feeling the strain of these deployments and the uncertainty and anxiety that is so prevalent in their lives now and they understand that things are going to continue this way for some time. However just as their Soldiers are doing, family members left behind everywhere are continuing to meet the challenges of their daily lives, support each other as well as their communities and look forward to a better safer time when their loved ones will return home.*

*We at AUSA Family Programs want to assure all Army families that we are here to provide information and assistance and that our prayers are going out to them and to their Soldiers.*

### Ways to Donate Phone Cards, Groceries and "Gifts From the Homefront" to Deployed Servicemembers

The Department of Defense announced today that any American can now help troops in contingency operations call home. The Defense Department has authorized the Armed Services Exchanges to sell prepaid calling cards to any individual or organization that wishes to purchase cards for troops who are deployed. The "Help Our Troops Call Home" program is designed to help Servicemembers call home from Operations Iraqi Freedom and Operation Enduring Freedom. For those wishing to donate a prepaid calling card to a military member may log on to any of the three Armed Services Exchange web sites: [www.aafes.com](http://www.aafes.com), [www.navy-nex.com](http://www.navy-nex.com), [www.usmc-mccs.org](http://www.usmc-mccs.org). Click the "Help Our Troops Call Home" link. From there, a prepaid calling card may be purchased for an individual at his or her deployed address or to "any service member" deployed or hospitalized. The Armed Services Exchanges will distribute cards donated to "any service member" through the American Red Cross, Air Force Aid Society and the Fisher House Foundation. The "Gift of Groceries" program allows anyone to purchase commissary gift certificates at [www.commissaries.com](http://www.commissaries.com) or by calling toll free 1-877-770-GIFT. The Armed Services Exchanges offer the "Gift From the Homefront" gift certificate for merchandise at these exchange web sites: [www.aafes.com](http://www.aafes.com) and [www.navy-nex.com](http://www.navy-nex.com) or by calling toll free 1-877-770-GIFT. Gift certificates may be purchased to be mailed to Servicemembers and family members or will be distributed to "any servicemember." Only authorized commissary and exchange patrons may redeem the gift certificates at military commissaries and exchanges, including those stores supporting deployed personnel around the globe.

### Operation Homecoming: Writing the Wartime Experience

U.S. troops returning from duty will be encouraged to write about their wartime experiences through a new National Endowment for the Arts (NEA) program, called *Operation Homecoming*. The program will provide writing workshops led by distinguished authors such as Mark Bowden, author of *Black Hawk Down*; Tom Clancy, author of *The Hunt for Red October*; Bobbie Ann Mason, author of *In Country*; and James McBride, author of *The Color of Water*. *Operation Homecoming* will also include a CD containing interviews and readings by military writers, an online writing tutorial, and an anthology of new wartime writing contributed by the military and their families. The project is being presented in partnership with the DoD and the Southern Arts Federation, and is made possible by The Boeing Company. The workshops led by two-person teams of writers, many of them veterans themselves, will be hosted by at least eight military installations around the country and overseas. The *Operation Homecoming* anthology will collect the stories and reflections of the returning troops in a variety of forms - from fiction, verse, and letters to essay, memoir, and personal journals. The National Endowment for the Arts is also soliciting service members' and family members' wartime recollections reflected in prose, essays, letters and other writings for a book anthology of recent conflicts. Submissions for the anthology will be accepted through Dec. 31, and can be sent electronically to: [submissions@operationhomecoming.org](mailto:submissions@operationhomecoming.org) or mailed to:

**Operation Homecoming**  
**National Endowment for the Arts**  
Suite 519  
1100 Pennsylvania Avenue, N.W.  
Washington, D.C. 20506.

For more information on these programs, visit: <http://www.nea.gov/news/news04/OHAnnounce.html> or [www.operationhomecoming.org](http://www.operationhomecoming.org).

### Are Our Servicemembers Serving in Operation Iraqi Freedom Receiving Their Mail?

According to the General Accounting Office report, more than 65 million pounds of letters and parcels were delivered to troops serving in Operation Iraqi Freedom in 2003, and problems with prompt and reliable mail delivery surfaced early on. They reported that soldiers and Marines in Operation Iraqi Freedom were unhappy with mail service; almost 60 percent of 127 service members surveyed said they were "dissatisfied" with the timeliness of mail delivery. More than half of the surveyed soldiers from Fort Stewart, Ga., and Marines from Camp Pendleton, Calif., said they waited four weeks or longer to get mail. Others commented that mail took as long as four months to work its way through the system. Another 80 percent said they were aware of mail that was sent to them but was not received while they were deployed. The non-receipt of mail became a concern for friends and family back home. Although a test of transit time for mail delivery by military postal officials showed that so-called "data test letters" arrived in theater within the wartime standard of 11 to 14 days, service members said their personal mail actually took much longer to reach them. For more information on mail delivery for our soldiers in Iraq visit: <http://www.gao.gov/new.items/d04484.pdf>

### Army Enlistment Bonus Changes

Effective 15 April 2004, a seasonal bonus (SB) of \$9000 is available to NPS 11X applicants with a Tier I education credential, TSC I-III A, for a term of service (TOS) of three or more years with a priority training seat shipping no later than 31 May 2004. A \$4000 SB is available to NPS 11X applicants with a Tier I credential, TSC IIIB, for a TOS of three or more years with a priority training seat shipping no later than 31 May 2004. The request system will determine the training seat priority. The SB is for new contracts only. Applicants receiving the SB and later choosing to renegotiate their enlistment contract may lose their SB if a

priority training seat is not available. The total bonus amount for a three-year term of service may not exceed \$10,000 for new recruits in MOS 11X only, who ship no later than 31 May 2004. For more details, go to:  
<https://perscomnd04.army.mil/milpermsgs.nsf/ee2966d4436df73a852569a50056935d/c1b761fda8dc3fc785256e77003f90bc?OpenDocument>

### Army Explains Iraq Extension Bonuses

The Pentagon is offering \$1,000 monthly bonuses for all 20,000 soldiers whose tours in Iraq and Kuwait have been extended beyond a year, according to Army officials. The \$1,000 bonus was spelled out in a memorandum recently signed by Charles S. Abell, principal deputy undersecretary of defense for personnel and readiness. According to the memo, the extension bonus is reserved for "military members who are in a unit currently deployed in Iraq that the combatant commander (Gen. John Abizaid) has determined will be required to remain in Iraq beyond the normal 12-month rotation return date." For more information on this program, visit: [http://www.military.com/NewContent/0,13190,SS\\_041904\\_Bonuses,00.html](http://www.military.com/NewContent/0,13190,SS_041904_Bonuses,00.html)

### Buried Veterans Records Now on the Web

The VA has made it easier and faster for the public to get answers about family history, old war buddies or famous war heroes. The agency has put on the Web 3.2 million records for veterans buried at 120 national cemeteries since the Civil War. The VA's Nationwide Gravesite Locator <http://www.cem.va.gov/> also has records for some state veterans cemeteries and burials in Arlington National Cemetery since 1999. The navigator includes names, dates of birth and death, military service dates, service branch and rank if known, cemetery information and grave location in the cemetery. For more information, please visit: [http://www.military.com/NewsContent/0,13319,FL\\_records\\_041304,00.html](http://www.military.com/NewsContent/0,13319,FL_records_041304,00.html)

### Pentagon Memorial Fund Now Accepting Donations

In remembrance of those who lost their lives at the Pentagon and aboard Flight 77 on September 11, 2001, a simple and elegant memorial dedicated to the victims will be built on the Pentagon grounds near the location of Flight 77's point of impact. This memorial will be open to the public as a beautiful place for collective contemplation, remembrance, reflection and renewal. The role of the Pentagon Memorial Fund is to support the development, construction and completion of this memorial. The goal is to raise \$30 million to build the park and to create an endowment which will maintain the memorial for future generations. About \$17.5 million of collected funds will be used to build the memorial and about \$10 million in donations will be earmarked for memorial maintenance. Over \$2 million has already been collected, including a \$1 million donation from the Anheuser-Busch Foundation, the first major corporate donor to the Pentagon Memorial Fund. For more information or to donate to this fund, go to: [www.pentagonmemorial.net](http://www.pentagonmemorial.net)

### Thrift Savings Plan: A Good Way to Increase Wealth

Defense Department officials want thousands more Servicemembers to invest in their future through the Thrift Savings Plan (TSP) and now is a good time for Servicemembers to start paying themselves. The current TSP open season started April 15 and runs until June 30. This is the time Servicemembers can start or change their contributions to their TSP account. Servicemembers can contribute up to 9 percent of their basic pay each month, and up to 100 percent of incentive pay and special pay, including bonus and combat pay. But their total contributions from taxable pay may not exceed the Internal Revenue Service limit of \$13,000 for 2004. More than 220,000 uniformed service members signed up for TSP in 2002, the first year they were eligible. By December 2003, more than 390,000 people were investing in TSP. TSP enrollment can be done online through the myPay Web site <https://mypay.dfas.mil/mypay.aspx> or, by completing a TSP enrollment form (TSP-U-1) and turning it in at the local pay or personnel office. Enrollment forms are available online at the TSP Web site <http://www.tsp.gov>.

### In-State Tuition – How to Find Out if The State You Are Moving to is Military Friendly

Mobility of the military community, coupled with the state specific criteria for determining the eligibility for in-state tuition, results in the military spouse/family member facing a variety of rules and procedures that may or may not result in designation as in-state residents for tuition and state financial aid programs. [www.armyeducation.mil](http://www.armyeducation.mil) has a very helpful tool that shows which states provide in-state tuition to Servicemembers and their families.

### Writers Wanted!

Erika Jordan of Fort Lewis, WA, whose husband is currently deployed in Iraq is compiling book for military families that includes articles, short stories, and inspirational pieces. Please submit original works to [lecj1612@aol.com](mailto:lecj1612@aol.com). These creative pieces should be 250-750 words and if your story is selected, you will receive \$10.00 and your name will appear in the book with your published piece. Winners will be notified that their submission was selected within the next four weeks. Please email [Erika Jordan](mailto:ErikaJordan) with any questions.

### Quilts Bring Comfort to Children of Deployed Service Members

Ann Flaherty's 18-month-old grandson was suffering from the emotional stress of his father not coming home from work as he usually did. He carried pictures of his dad around, and began having temper tantrums and difficulty sleeping. Then Flaherty

came to the rescue with a "Daddy quilt" that helps her grandson cope with the absence of his father. And it may eventually help thousands of children of Servicemembers who are deployed to Iraq, Afghanistan and other parts of the globe. Ms. Flaherty developed the idea of scanning in pictures of the deployed father's or mother's and incorporating them into a quilt for the children of these deployed parents. She found that many young children were having a very difficult time adjusting to the loss of one or both parents due to deployment and the quilts amazing brought comfort to these children and helped ease the emotional stress they were feeling. Soon the word got around and Ann realized that her idea for her grandson Christian was a great idea; however that she could not keep up with all of the requests for these quilts.

Ann then asked Lynne Grates, executive director of the Fort Bragg/Pope Air Force Base, N.C., Armed Services YMCA and Clitha Mason, the arts and humanities director, for help. "They loved the idea. So we formed 'Operation Kid Comfort,' Flaherty said. Operation Kid Comfort ended up being born out of necessity and is designed to serve children ages 5 and under of deployed Servicemembers. Operation Kid Comfort was so successful that it earned the Fort Bragg/Pope Air Force Base Armed Services YMCA branch the 2004 Raytheon Program Achievement Award in the Best New Program category. The award was recently presented during the ASYMCA's 17th annual Recognition Luncheon on Capitol Hill.

Flaherty said when the kids are given the quilts; they take instant, total possession of them. "Immediately, no one else can touch them," she said. "They're theirs. It's amazing how quickly it works and how quickly they react to having them. Flaherty had only one stipulation for recipients of the quilts: "On receiving a quilt, the parent or guardian of the child should realize that the quilt is for the child – to play with, sleep with or just carry around – not to be used as a wall hanging for people to admire."

Last winter, Georgia (Statesboro) Southern University's assistant professor of marketing, Kathleen Gruben, arranged for two of her classes to take on Operation Kid Comfort as their class project. Flaherty said they developed marketing and advertising strategies and a Web site. In addition to needing funds to support the program, Flaherty said Operation Kid Comfort needs fabric, batting, threads, sewing equipment, tools and supplies and photo transfer technology. All donations of goods are tax deductible. For more information on Operation Kid Comfort, write to:

**ASYMCA of Fort Bragg/Pope Air Force Base**  
**Clitha Mason, Arts and Humanities Director**  
**Bldg. 2-2411**

**Fort Bragg, NC 28307**

Or, call or write to:

**Operation Kid Comfort**  
**208 Thorncliff Drive**  
**Fayetteville, NC 28303**  
**Tel: (910) 436-0500**

### **Tips for Evaluating an Online Program**

The popularity of earning a degree or certificate online is quickly increasing. Servicemembers who are exploring this option are encouraged to read some tips on how to evaluate a program to ensure their needs will be met. In addition to confirming that a program or school accepts military benefits, Servicemembers should also determine if the class is going to be delivered in a format conducive to their learning habits, the accreditation status of the school, and research resources availability, among other things. For more information, go to: [http://www.military.com/Education/Content/0,13302,Education\\_Evaluating,00.html](http://www.military.com/Education/Content/0,13302,Education_Evaluating,00.html)

### **VA Expands Operations on Military Posts**

The Department of Veterans Affairs has expanded its liaison offices to now support 136 military installations to assist with Soldier transition from active duty and it is working to make it easier for disabled Soldiers to get the help they need. Part of the expanded VA service on military installations is ensuring a VA counselor talks to wounded veterans in military hospitals before those veterans are discharged from the military service. Those hospitals include Walter Reed Medical Center, Washington, D.C.; Eisenhower Army Medical Center, Fort Gordon, Ga.; Brooke Army Medical Center, Fort Sam Houston, Texas; and Madigan Army Medical Center at Western Regional Medical Command, Tacoma, Wash. Go to: [http://www.military.com/NewsContent/0,13319,usa2\\_051104.00.html](http://www.military.com/NewsContent/0,13319,usa2_051104.00.html) for more information.

### **VA Reaches Out to Newest Combat Veterans**

The Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) is expanding its efforts to reach veterans of combat operations in Iraq and Afghanistan to ensure they are aware of benefits they have earned. Secretary of Veterans Affairs Anthony J. Principi is sending a personal letter to more than 150,000 veterans of Operations Iraqi Freedom and Enduring Freedom who have recently separated from the military to thank them for their service and to remind them of their eligibility for VA health care and other benefits. For more information, please visit: <http://www1.va.gov/opa/pressrel/PressArtInternet.cfm?id=811>

### **DoD Begins New Tricare West Region Transition**

The Department of Defense (DoD) announced that on June 1, 2004, beneficiaries in the military healthcare plan, Tricare, in Oregon, Washington and northern Idaho will transition to the new Tricare West region and will receive health services and support through its new regional contractor, TriWest Healthcare Alliance Corp. These states constitute the current Tricare Region 11 area. The second of the three-phase West Region transition will take place on July 1, when beneficiaries in California, Hawaii and Alaska will become part of Tricare West. The final phase of this new expanded West Region will take place on Oct. 1 and will include the beneficiaries located in Arizona, Colorado, Iowa, Idaho, Kansas, Minnesota, Missouri, Montana, North Dakota, Nebraska, New Mexico, Nevada, South Dakota, Utah, Wyoming and Central Texas. The West Region makes up the current Tricare Regions 7, 8, 9, 10, 11 and 12. For more information visit:

<http://www.defenselink.mil/releases/2004/nr20040518-0803.html>

### **New Small Business Rules to Benefit Service-Disabled Vets**

A new procurement program boosts federal contract opportunities for service-disabled veteran-owned small businesses, Small Business Administration officials announced. The interim rule was published May 5 and is effective immediately. The Federal Acquisition Regulatory Council concurrently released regulations implementing the program, officials said. Officials explained the new rule adds provisions to the Code of Federal Regulations that will allow contracting officers to restrict contract awards to small businesses owned by service-disabled veterans when there is a reasonable expectation that two or more such small businesses will submit bids at a fair market price. For more information visit: <http://www.sba.gov/admin/about.html>. Additional resources can be accessed at [www.sba.gov/vets](http://www.sba.gov/vets)

### **Child Care Providers Volunteer Their Services to Support Troops Returning From Iraq and Afghanistan**

NACCRRRA, the Nation's Network of Child Care Resource and Referral Agencies, today announced the launch of *Operation Child Care*, a national, voluntary effort of local child care resource and referral agencies and child care providers to provide a few hours of free child care for National Guard and Reserve military personnel returning for two weeks of rest and recuperation leave from Iraq and Afghanistan. To find local child care at no cost for Guard and Reserve members on R&R leave, call 1-800-424-2246 or visit [www.ChildCareAware.org](http://www.ChildCareAware.org).

### **House Armed Services Committee Increases Survivor Benefit Plan Payments**

The House Armed Services Committee announced it has approved eliminating the social security offset under the Survivor Benefit Plan (SBP) by increasing the annuities paid to survivors of military retirees who are 62 or older. The SBP provision was included in H.R. 4200, the Fiscal Year 2005 National Defense Authorization Act, which was passed by the committee this evening. Committee Chairman Duncan Hunter credited Rep. Jeff Miller (R-FL) for passage of the measure. Miller, a member of the committee, introduced the Military Survivor Benefits Improvement Act earlier this year and pushed for its inclusion in the defense authorization act. The issue concerns uniformed services survivor benefits, which, relative to premiums paid, do not match what was promised and provided to survivors of other federal retirees. For more information, visit

<http://www.house.gov/bilirakis/lateact.htm>

### **Groups Arrange Foster Care for Military Pets**

Deploying overseas means leaving friends and loved ones behind. For service members with no one to take care of their beloved dog, cat, bird or other pet, it once meant also having to abandon or turn the pet over to a shelter — never to see it again. Thanks to two nonprofit groups — the Military Pets Foster Project and Operation Noble Foster — service members can now arrange foster care for their pets while they're gone. The Military Pets Foster Project, a nonprofit group founded by animal lover Steve Albin, has placed about 15,000 pets in foster homes throughout the United States while their owners serve in Iraq and Afghanistan. Operation Noble Foster, which specializes in foster homes for cats, has found temporary homes for about 25 military cats a month since shortly after Sept. 11, 2001, according to founder Linda Mercer. For more information, please visit Military Pets Foster Project at: <http://www.netpets.org/netp/foster.php> or Operation Noble Foster at [www.operationnoblefoster.org](http://www.operationnoblefoster.org)

### **Army Introduces Disabled Soldier System (DS3)**

On April 30, 2004, the Department of the Army introduced a Disabled Soldier Support System (DS3) Initiative that provides its severely disabled Soldiers and their families with a system of advocacy and follow-up with personal support to assist them as they transition from military service to the civilian community. For more information, please go to [www.ArmyDS3.org](http://www.ArmyDS3.org).

### **Should the Age of Retirement for National Guard and Reservists be Reduced From 60 to 55?**

Senate bills S.Amdt. 1811 and S. 1689 (Emergency Supplemental Appropriations for Iraq and Afghanistan Security and Reconstruction Act, 2004) recently failed to pass. The bills favored a decrease in the age of retirement benefits for National Guard and Reservists from the age of 60 to 55. For more information, go to:

[http://www.military.com/MilitaryReport/0,12914,MR\\_Action\\_052404,00.html?ESRC=mr.nl](http://www.military.com/MilitaryReport/0,12914,MR_Action_052404,00.html?ESRC=mr.nl)



### Civilian Allowances to be Reduced in South Korea

Because of the weakening value of South Korea's won against the U.S. dollar, post allowance for U.S. civilians will be cut in half. Post-allowance classifications for the Seoul, Osan and Uijongbu areas will drop from 10 to 5; the allowance is calculated based on spendable income, the money a person uses off base to purchase goods and services on the South Korean economy. Civilians in South Korea were first made eligible for post allowance in July 2002. Since then, the rates have fluctuated up and down based on the exchange rate with the dollar. Employees can calculate their specific allowances at <http://www.state.gov/m/a/als/1736.htm>.

### Committee Clears 6 Bills to Boost Vets Education, Housing, Healthcare and Disability Benefits

The House Committee on Veterans' Affairs cleared a package of six bills that would expand and strengthen a number of education, housing, health care, and disability programs for veterans and active duty military personnel. Amongst the bills passed by committee are [H.R. 1716](#), the 'Veterans Earn and Learn Act' and [H.R. 4175](#). According to Committee Chairman Chris Smith (NJ), sponsor of four of the bills approved, "These bills would not only help Servicemembers in their transition from active duty to civilian jobs and housing, they would also help strengthen VA health care and benefit programs for those veterans that rely on them." For more information, go to: <http://veterans.house.gov/news/108/5-19-04.html>

### House, Senate Agree to 3.5% Pay Raise for Servicemembers in 2005

The House and Senate armed services committees have agreed to an across-the-board 3.5 percent pay raise for Servicemembers in 2005, as well as making permanent increases in deployment-related pays. The pay provisions are part of the fiscal 2005 defense authorization bill passed recently by the House Armed Services Committee; and a different version of the same bill passed last week by the Senate Armed Services Committee. Both bills add money to the Bush administration's proposals for military health care, especially for reservists and their families, and for force protection measures, including more armored Humvees and armor kits for other vehicles for troops in Iraq. Both committees authorized \$422.2 billion for the Department of Defense in 2005, the full amount requested by the Bush administration and \$20.9 billion more than the amount authorized by the Congress for fiscal 2004. But because the administration's 2005 proposal did not include funding for operations in Iraq or Afghanistan, the House bill also adds an additional \$25 billion in "emergency" money for those missions. For more information, please see <http://armedservices.house.gov/pressreleases/2004/04-05-05mchugh.htm>.

### AAFES News – [www.ausa.org/family](http://www.ausa.org/family)

- [Army & Air Force Exchange Service Make Moving Easier for Military Families](#)
- [Army & Air Force Exchange Service Aids Humanitarian Nation Building Effort in Iraq](#)
- [Troops in Iraq and Afghanistan Can Now Call Home for Just a Quarter a Minute](#)
- [Phone Card Gifts Make it Easy for Americans to Show Deployed Troops They Care](#)

### Commissary News – [www.ausa.org/family](http://www.ausa.org/family)

- [Military Spouses Pursue Careers Through DeCA](#)
- [Scholarships for Military Children Program Makes Money Grow on Trees this Spring](#)
- [New Savings You've Earned Program Points the Way to Commissary Savings](#)
- [Students and the Commissary: A Winning Team!](#)
- [Study Does Not Recommend Changing Commissary Pricing Method](#)
- [New Commissary Newsletter Keeps Customers Connected To Their Benefit](#)
- [Unique Event Celebrates "Full Time" Commissary Privileges for Reserve Forces](#)